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Indonesia: Suharto is seeking to allay civilian criticism of the army's political role without in any way giving up military predominance.

A presidential decision of 26 July dissolved the Supreme Operations Command (KOTI), a holdover of the Sukarno era through which the army had reinforced its controls in foreign affairs and in various domestic political and economic areas. Suharto has also dissolved a centrally directed agency holding authority over provincial governments. The agency had been largely staffed by the military. These functions will be largely taken over by civilians.

On 27 July, Suharto announced approval of the formation of a new Moslem political party. It will be composed of members of the Moslem Masjumi party, banned by Sukarno in 1960, and of groups once affiliated with it or ideologically sympathetic to it. The new party will provide both political and geographic balance. Drawing its major strength from West Java and Sumatra, it will act as a counterweight against the orthodox Moslem Nahdatul Ulama and the secularist National Party, both of which are based in Central and East Java, and will provide another channel for civilian views.

Suharto's civilian advisers are greatly encouraged by these developments, some of which are the direct result of their suggestions. They see them particularly as indicating a reduction in the influence of the acting president's personal military staff, which on occasion has appeared to undercut the cabinet itself.

These steps are a considerable gesture toward redressing the civilian-military relationship. The army's controls remain secure, however, since it continues to hold the presidency, the cabinet chairmanship, a third of the cabinet portfolios, two thirds of the governorships, half of the ambassadorships, and a generous share of all subministerial and local offices.

NOTE

Venezuela: The Communist Party of Venezuela is searching for some way to take part in the presidential election next year. [redacted]

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[redacted] the Communists, although prohibited from engaging in political activity, are engaged in a series of talks with several leftist groups. Their objective is to set up a popular front through which they could then work. The Communist Party's decision to return to political action is one of the major causes of the split with the faction which favors guerrilla action in line with the doctrines of the Latin American Solidarity Organization now meeting in Havana. [redacted]

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